

VZCZCXRO8119
RR RUEH DU RUEH MR RUEH RN
DE RUEH FR #2149/01 3291453
ZNY CCCCC ZZH
R 241453Z NOV 08
FM AMEMBASSY PARIS
TO RUEHC/SECSTATE WASHDC 4913
INFO RUCNSAD/SOUTHERN AF DEVELOPMENT COMMUNITY
RUEHFRS/AMCONSUL STRASBOURG 0624

C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 02 PARIS 002149

SIPDIS

E.O. 12958: DECL: 11/24/2018

TAGS: [PREL](#) [PHUM](#) [KDEM](#) [ZI](#) [FR](#)

SUBJECT: FRANCE/ZIMBABWE: MORGAN TSVANGIRAI'S VISIT TO
FRANCE

Classified By: Political Minister-Counselor Kathleen Allegrone, 1.4 (b/
d).

¶1. (C) MDC leader Morgan Tsvangirai of Zimbabwe visited France November 17-19, beginning in Strasbourg at the EU meeting on development. He met with FM Kouchner in Strasbourg and traveled in Kouchner's plane to Paris. In Paris on November 18, he met with Claude Gueant (Secretary-General at the Presidency), committees at the National Assembly and Senate, and MFA officials over lunch, and then held a press conference with Kouchner. Tsvangirai stressed: (1) the very dire humanitarian crisis in Zimbabwe; (2) his appreciation for French humanitarian assistance; and (3) his willingness to participate in a national unity government, but only if real power sharing were available and legally enforceable structures were in place to ensure such power sharing. He did not believe that what Mugabe had proposed was sufficient to permit his participation. Tsvangirai was ambivalent about the need for further sanctions but asked that countries like France stick to sending strong messages about big principles, refrain from trying to micromanage the situation in Zimbabwe, and apply political pressure on Mugabe "discreetly" so as not to provoke a backlash. END SUMMARY.

¶2. (C) Isabelle de Boisgelen, MFA desk officer for Zimbabwe, on November 21 provided a readout on Zimbabwean leader Morgan Tsvangirai's visit earlier in the week to Strasbourg and Paris. Boisgelen said that confirmation of Tsvangirai's visit to Strasbourg, to attend a November 17 EU event on development, came quite late and news of his coming to Paris even later, leaving little time to organize an elaborate set of meetings. Tsvangirai met with FM Kouchner in Strasbourg, as well as a number of other world leaders, including many Africans. This provided an opportunity for him to speak directly to interested leaders and to network. He spent time with Kouchner in Strasbourg. Because of an Air France strike, Kouchner offered Tsvangirai a ride to Paris on the FM's plane, which allowed the two to spend more time together.

¶3. (C) Tsvangirai was accompanied at all times by an assistant who came to France with him from Africa, and Zimbabwe's Ambassador to France (whom Boisgelen described as a professional with a good perspective despite the difficult demands of his job). Tsvangirai met on November 18 with Claude Gueant, the Secretary-General at the French Presidency, and then, separately, with foreign affairs committees at the National Assembly and Senate. MFA A/S-equivalent Jean de Glinasty, along with DAS-equivalent Barateau, and desk officer Boisgelen, lunched with Tsvangirai at the MFA. Tsvangirai and Kouchner held a joint press conference the afternoon of November 18, with Tsvangirai leaving France the next day.

Tsvangirai's Key Messages

¶4. (C) Boisgelen said that Tsvangirai emphasized several points repeatedly in his talks. First, he stressed the

increasingly dire humanitarian situation in Zimbabwe, with serious breakdowns in the public health and hygiene sectors. He expressed appreciation for the assistance France and other non-Africans had provided. (Boisgelen said that European humanitarian contributions, both from the EU as an institution and from members states, totaled 70 million euro in 2005, 86 million euro in 2006, and 91 million euro in 2007, with, as she noted, "significant increases every year.")

15. (C) Politically, Tsvangirai said that he would participate in a national unity government if two conditions were met: Mugabe had to agree to a "real" powersharing arrangement and any political agreement had to be accompanied by legal and constitutional changes that would give the force of law to any such arrangement. These two conditions had not yet been met, so Tsvangirai was not willing to participate in the government. Boisgelen reported that Tsvangirai also expressed concern that Mugabe's ability to appoint government officials had to be regularized and put into a legal structure.

16. (C) Asked whether Tsvangirai was optimistic that his conditions would be met, Boisgelen said that he said he was "serene" because the MDC's strength in the legislature ensured a certain level of power. Boisgelen confided that she found this somewhat naive and perhaps even delusional -- she observed that the MDC's strength was razor thin, depended on continued cooperation with coalition partners, and could easily be overturned if Mugabe did something radical, such as dissolving the legislature. She found Tsvangirai's attitude difficult to understand, but he seemed to place value on what he considered the MDC's strength in the legislature.

PARIS 00002149 002 OF 002

17. (C) Tsvangirai, while heaping praise on France and the EU for their support, advised that outsiders stick to broad principles in discussing Zimbabwe and refrain from trying to micromanage the situation there. He suggested, moreover, that outsiders apply pressure in Harare "discreetly," which Boisgelen said the French understood to mean that they should avoid irritating Mugabe by speaking too harshly, which could only provoke a backlash. Tsvangirai also reminded the French that if he managed to bring about democratic change in Zimbabwe, that would not mean that its problems were solved and that the Europeans could go home feeling satisfied. He said that outside assistance would be even more necessary as Zimbabwe struggled to regain its footing and move forward.

18. (C) Boisgelen said that Tsvangirai, notably, was quite ambivalent about the utility of increased sanctions. He said, according to Boisgelen, that "the current situation in Zimbabwe had nothing to do with sanctions," i.e., that Mugabe's repression would likely have taken place in any circumstances.

French Support

19. (C) Boisgelen said that the French were supportive of Tsvangirai's efforts, the main thrust of the French message being that the will of the Zimbabwean people, as expressed in the first round of voting, had to be respected. They lauded Tsvangirai's courage and the many years of struggle and sacrifice he had spent in trying to bring about democratic change to Zimbabwe. They shared his concern about the humanitarian situation and indicated France would remain engaged, stressing the importance of being able to have access to those in need of humanitarian assistance. The French also encouraged Tsvangirai to increase his base of support among Africans, especially Zimbabwe's neighbors, since it was clear that Africans as a whole wanted to be involved in helping Zimbabwe resolve its crisis.

110. (C) Boisgelen offered several personal observations. She said the meetings had gone well and were positives for both sides. It was good for Tsvangirai to meet directly with

his French supporters and to get to know them. There was high demand on the French side to meet with him, and this was accomplished by the sessions at the National Assembly and Senate, where a broad swathe of elected officials were able to confer with him. On the down side, Boisgelen said that the MFA officials with whom he lunched were surprised that he did not make more of the occasion ("we were in the palm of his hand, and he should have sensed this") by making a more forceful and engaging presentation. On the other hand, Boisgelen said that he may have been worn out by his travels and the earlier meetings and saw lunch as a more low-key affair. She noted that he made a strong comeback at the press conference with Kouchner, where "he came alive once he was facing an audience and had a microphone before him."

STAPLETON